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SUBJECT: GOVERNOR,S AVIPA PLUS ANNOUNCEMENT FOR ARGHANDAB
WELL RECEIVED

REF: KABUL 3737

11. (SBU) Summary and comment. At a November 5 shura in Arghandab District, Kandahar, southern Afghanistan, Governor Wesa announced the USAID Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Agriculture (AVIPA) Plus program for the Arghandab valley. After a thorough explanation of the counterinsurgency stability program which focuses on agriculture support, the shura elders praised the provincial and district government's initiative on bringing the program to Arghandab district. Elders also voiced concerns that will need addressing to fully implement the AVIPA Plus program, which include absentee land ownership, corrupt agriculture cooperatives, and security. Given high level of participation from the provincial and district governments coupled with the high attendance by local elders and farmers, this shura and program rollout can be seen as a success that will need to be maintained through quick implementation. End summary and comment.

POSITIVE LAUNCH FOR AVIPA PLUS

12. (SBU) At a November 5 shura at the Arghandab district center, Kandahar Governor Tooryalai Wesa announced the rollout of the USAID Afghanistan Voucher for Increased Production in Agriculture (AVIPA) Plus program for the troubled Arghandab Valley. The Governor opened the meeting by explaining the program, which is primarily designed to serve as a counterinsurgency stability tool, to a well-attended group of elders and farmers, and noting the program's three major components:

- Agriculture inputs: provide: subsidized saplings, wheat seed and other agriculture inputs to farmers through the equitable voucher system
- Cash-for-work projects: offer temporary employment and income to local laborers, particularly young men, through short-term public works projects
- Grants: award small grants to agribusiness and community-based associations in support of the agriculture economy

13. (SBU) The shura was well-attended by local villagers in large part because the USAID Office of Transition Initiatives (USAID/OTI) in Arghandab district had participated in patrols with the military Stryker Brigade the previous day, encouraging Nagahan villagers to go to the district center to air their grievances while provincial officials were present.

14. (SBU) Wesa challenged the crowd, telling them that the outcome and success of the program depended on the people of Kandahar. He further emphasized the importance of provincial sustainability that can only be achieved by the people and

not through reliance on "foreigners." (Note: Wesa was eager to announce the program as his own initiative after expressing to PRT members on November 4 his perception that he could not establish good governance in the province when the population viewed all development benefits being derived from the international community. End note.) Kandahar City Mayor Hamidi and other provincial and Arghandab district leaders echoed the Governor's comments and gave full support for the program, which is to be delivered via the Kandahar Agriculture Ministry.

CONCERNS BY ELDERS

15. (SBU) The announcement was well-received by those in attendance who noted that the Arghandab Valley was the "right place" to start the AVIPA Plus program given its long agriculture history. However, a few of the elders also raised problems that have been plaguing the agriculture sector in the area for some time:

-- Absentee Land Ownership: The elders noted that absentee land ownership impedes farmers' ability to make permanent improvements to the land they are tending.

-- Corrupt Agriculture Cooperatives: Many in the crowd pointed to the long-standing issues surrounding the agriculture cooperatives in the area, which have been known to resell used or broken equipment and could be bribed. The Governor responded by asking these farmers to create their own cooperative with trusted members, and the District Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (DAIL) Director stressed to the elders that these problems needed to be

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reported quickly for action to be taken.

-- Security: A few elders pointed out that if they cannot work on their farms or orchards due to security concerns that they could not prevent theft on their lands. The Governor and Kandahar City Mayor assured the crowd that they were working with the ANA on security. (Note: Many areas of Arghandab remain kinetic, and following the shura, a US military convoy was hit by an improvised explosive device as it departed the shura. End note.)

COMMENT

16. (SBU) This shura is a great success in that it serves as a strong example of connecting GIROA to the people. First, from a political perspective, officials from the provincial and district levels addressed a group of elders and district citizens as a unified body, showing solidarity and support for a program that will directly benefit Kandahar. Second, in what hopes to be the first of many joint appearances, this is the first time that many of these officials had visited Arghandab, which went a long way with the people. Third, the shura was heavily attended, and the mood was positive following the announcement of the AVIPA program, opening a vital window of opportunity in this district.

17. (SBU) However, it is important to also note that the elders complained that similar promises for support had been made in the past with little to no follow-up. Therefore, while keeping the security conditions in mind, expeditious movement on this program is key to maintaining the positive momentum captured at this event.
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